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THE BASIC SPIRITUAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE RELIGION OF THE CHIANG.*

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In my research work among the Chiang tribesmen in the N. W. of Szechwan I early came to the conclusions; (1) that they came originally from somewhere in Asia Minor, and (2) that their Old-Testament pattern of religion represented an early patriarchal type, known to the Hebrews before their settlement in the holy land, and followed by them more or less after arrival there. To this opinion we still mainly adhere. Though much more has been learnt in recent years about their customs and ritual nothing has come to light to change this view in any radical sense.

It is known that they speak a language allied to that of the Tibetans, Chiarong and Nosu. The presumption is that they are of one stock. But, nevertheless, they have certain racial characteristics of their own. They are finer in physique and frequently show Semitic features of countenance which these races fail to do. Many of their customs, too, indicate a closer affinity to those of the Hebrews. Even if it be asserted that the Tibetans and Chiarong came also from the West—which we believe—yet, because of these facts, caution is needed before sweepingly including them in the same racial stock as these three races. The Chiang is a sort of a Jew among our West China peoples. You can scarcely hide him even when his blood has been mingled with a strain of Chinese. He has a way with him, an appearance and a religious outlook that marks him out from others around him.

We admit we have been criticised for doubting the classification. But the language test does not always hold. There are many races talking English to-day who cannot be called Anglo-Saxon. Did the Chiang always speak the language they do to-day? He would be bold who asserted they did without sufficient proof of the same. The suspicion is strong that they did not. To-day, as we hear more of their wonderful religion this suspicion may grow stronger than ever.

What then is the nature of the Chiang religion? It is simply that of the olden-time worship in the high-places. We know that this was followed by the nations of Canaan and after their day by

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174 important among them, was Kou P'in-shan, called Isaac Whitheart in Mr. Torrance's book, "The First Missionaries To China." Mr. Torrance became interested in the customs of the Ch'iang, and especially in their religion. He believed that he saw physical resemblances between the Ch'iang and the Hebrews, and also that there were close resemblances in their social and religious customs. Mr. Kou was also interested, and at Mr. Torrance's suggestion he travelled among the Ch'iang looking for parallels. Both Mr. Torrance and Mr. Kou became convinced that the Ch'iang were Hebrews. Mr. Kou wrote a short pamphlet in which he expressed some of his veiws, and Mr. Torrance later wrote his book, "The First Missionaries To China," in which he elaborately states his belief and his proofs. The research of Mr. Torrance and of Mr. Kou P'in-shan became subjective rather than objective, a seeking for facts to prove a theory, and Mr. Torrance's book is the finest example that the writer has ever seen of the results of subjective research in the interpretation of the life and customs of a somewhat primitive people. Facts have seemed to fit into theories when they really do not, resemblances have been exaggerated, and differences overlooked. The Ch'iang are a likeable people with some good characteristics and Mr. Torrance is to be commended for his sympathy and love for them, but that they are Hebrews is most unlikely, and the key to an understanding of their psychology, life, customs, and religion is a knowledge of the psychology of primitive people.

The following facts are worthy of note:—

[776] 1. The Ch'iang are not monotheists. In most localities they have at least seventeen gods that are considered to be Ch'iang, and it is certain that there is no place where there is not at least five. It is likely that the seventeen gods are known and worshipped all over the Ch'iang region. This does not include numerous Chinese gods that are worshipped almost everywhere.

[144] 2. There is not a single physical characteristic that would convince a physical anthropologist that they are Hebrews.

[771] 3. Their sacred ceremonies are not primarily for the forgiveness of sins, as is asserted in "The First Missionaries to China," although that is included.

[177] 4. The sacred cane shown opposite page 98 in "The First Missionaries To China," is a Mt. Omei pilgrim's walking-stick with the dragon head knocked off. Nowhere else in West China are such